

INTERVIEW WITH DR. CHARLES B. CANBY

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Conducted by:

Dr. James L. Dodson

--and--

• Miss Paula Boyer

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- Dodson: I wonder Dr.Canby if you would tell us your full name and how long you have lived in the valley.
- Canby: My name is Charles and middle name is Borman and my last name is Canby, c-a-n-b-y, and at the present time I am sixty three years and five months old having been born on Septenber the ninth, 1913 and I came to Van Nuys specifically in approximately the early part of July of 1918.
- Dodson: Could you tell us about your career here since then, what you've been doing? I think you've been in a rather interesting type of work.
- Canby: Well my occupation has been that of a physician and surgeon and specializing in general surgery. My educational background is entirely in southern California. Began in the Van Nuys Grammer School in, ~~Sept~~think, September of 1919 and was completed at the Van Nuys High School in June of 1931 and then to UCLA and then to the University of Southern California School of Medicine where I graduated with my MD degree in June of 1939.
- Dodson: And then weren't you connected with the Valley Presbyterian Hospital after that?
- Canby: Yes, I was one of the early founders of Valley Presbyterian Hospital and this was under the impetus of Dr.,excuse me, of Martin Pollard along with a number of other doctors and lay public.
- Dodson: Were you instrumental in the founding of that hospital?
- Canby: No, I ~~was~~ by no means instrumental in the founding but I was a participant in time,in some money. I think that the credit for the founding of it goes to Martin Pollard.

Dodson: Can you tell us a little bit about how it came to be founded and when it opened?

Canby: Well, if you don't mind, I would like to digress a bit and not come to the founding of the Valley Presbyterian Hospital but to mention the medical status of the San Fernando Valley which, to me, I think is important.

Dodson: Well, that's exactly what we want from you, use your judgement.

Canby: The first doctor in Van Nuys was a Dr. Keller, it may have been Kelleher, I'm not too certain of that and he left in approximately May of 1918 and then my father, Charles Bernard Canby, came and took his practice so my father was the second medical doctor in Van Nuys and at that time there was a makeshift hospital and I use that word by today's standards of this makeshift hospital in Burbank. It served a purpose for the community, however, when people did need medical attention in the form of hospitalization, it was carried out in the Los Angeles hospitals and the primary ones were the California Lutheran and the Hospital of the Good Samaritan. In approximately 1929, I'm not too sure of the date, the hospital on Sherman Way was completed and, as I recall, it was approximately a thirty bed hospital. This was the second hospital and just about two years before that, or possibly three, a hospital was completed in San Fernando, so basically we then had two acceptable hospitals in the San Fernando Valley, the San Fernando Hospital and the Valley Hospital. With the rapid growth of the Valley and during the war time and the development of Lockheed, St. Joseph Hospital in Burbank was constructed. So with the continued westward growth, the need became apparent that we had to have a hospital of a larger size in Van Nuys.

A number of doctors banded together and tried to get this project off the ground and we worked and struggled with it for approximately a year and it failed. Somehow, during this failure period, Martin Pollard, whom you probably know as a very influential and community minded citizen, noted that the Armstead Memorial Fund, which had been given to The Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital, had funds available for the construction of a hospital in the San Fernando Valley. The Armstead Memorial Fund put in approximately one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, correction, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the purchase and beginning of the hospital. Federal money and state money and civil money was then produced through the leadership of Mr. Pollard. A lay group was formed and a number of doctors were involved and I happened to be one of those in this organization. The hospital was completed and, if my memory serves me correct, it opened with its first unit in about 1958. I say "If my memory serves me correct" because I was the first chairman of the medical staff at that time. It has subsequently grown to be one of the outstanding hospitals in the San Fernando Valley and throughout the state of California.

Dodson: That was fine, Dr. Canby. We're glad to get that because that is something that no one else had given us and it's good to have that on tape, the background of this. Can you tell us anything about the history of the hospital since, as you think about it, and the additions to it, how many beds it has at the present time, and so on, or how its grown?

Canby: Well, the hospital immediately was received by the community and by the doctors and it had not been open very long before it was recognized that we needed an addition, and again, under the leadership

of Mr. Pollard, plans were taken for a second unit and then for a third unit. I might add that we have had an exceedingly fine board of directors, lay board, and who have been very instrumental in securing large sums of money from benefactors. We've also [the hospital] added a large..this building is an education building having within it a large auditorium with a fairly adequate seating capacity, classrooms and smaller conference rooms, a nursing medical library, and additional offices. This ~~was the~~ last edition to the hospital and it is my understanding there will be no additions made other than parking facilities and small clinic buildings possibly in the future.

Boyer: Aren't there any hospitals in the Valley that have a building like that that has those facilities?

Canby: No, St. Joseph Hospital in Burbank has similar and equally as fine facilities.

Dodson: Dr.Canby, In thinking about the medical history of the Valley, is there any particular type of disease such as we hear about in the San Fernando Valley that affects people in this valley?

Boyer: I would say: or any chronic condition?

Canby: First of all, I don't know of any diseases that are indemic to the San Fernando Valley that are not found elsewhere. We're fortunate to be rid of many that plague other parts of the world

and its a mediterranean type of climate, it's very equitable. It used to be the home for people with advanced tuberculosis because of its dry climate and with the almost complete elimination of that disease its no longer a favorite center for it and most of the contagious diseases like polio have been eliminated so I can't say that there's anything unusual about our medical background at all; just the run of the mill rural and urban medicine.

Dodson: You mentioned some of the members of your board that have been instrumental in raising funds for the hospital. Could you give us the names of some of those civic leaders?

Canby: Yeah, I think thats rather important to have it documented. You can get this a little better but I'll try to recall--in addition there is Martin Pollard and there was Robert Fuller and Robert Fuller died a few years ago and he was a very hard working, quiet-spoken man who was the president of the San Fernando Valley Federal Savings and Loan. He was our president for a long while. Others who were instrumental I would say Jeanie Chisolm was one, Dick Dunne, Ferd Mendenhall, Stuart King

Dodson: Was Chase instrumental...?

Canby: Joseph Chase was to a small part a participant

in this.

Dodson: Dr. Canby, we'll get away for the moment from the hospital and medical side of the story and ask you about your early education in the Valley. Do you remember the schools and teachers and courses that you went to beginning in elementary school? What are your impressions now as you look back on that period?

Canby: Well I can vividly recall so many of my grammar school teachers and the principal as I remember was Aletha Sterns and it was only something like five or six years ago a reunion was held at the grammar school which she attended and this was not a class reunion of a specific class but of all of those who had graduated from the school. As I recall she was about eighty-four years old and she, I guess when you're a child and you see an older person they always look old and then as you grow old and look old yourself, the older person doesn't look changed at all. And I remember Mrs. Johnson very well. She was a very stern individual but a fine teacher. I have no idea how to compare grammar school in my day with those of today. I know that there was a great deal of discipline exerted and children were at times struck in the hand with a ruler and made to stand in a corner and it's my understanding that these things are forbidden today. We had a lot of discipline

on the playgrounds, we had organized sports and I well remember a Mr. Stuart who was our shop teacher and a fine man.

Dodson: You were mentioning this matter of discipline. Did you get as much vandalism and that sort of thing when you were in school as we seem to have now?

Canby: Very truthfully I do not recall any vandalism of the type that we have today. Occasionally someone would mark on the wall in the boy's lavatory with a chalk or crayon and to me that was about the extent of it. I don't recall windows being broken and when school would let out in June we knew all the poems and dirty poems about the teachers but none of those things really came to pass. It was a very peaceful termination of the year. We had a, I think, closer relationship with our teachers. We were not on a first name basis but as years went by we became quickly and I cherish the memory of so many of those teachers. I think they were fine and I think we had smaller classes than today. There was a means, if a child or a student didn't behave, well they taken out of school and it was up to the parents to make them tow the line. It wasn't left to the school to discipline the student. I think it's been a complete reversal which to me is rather abhorrant.

Dodson: Did you see much difference then when your own daughter Susan was in school of the training she received and the one and the one that you had received?

Canby: Well, it was a little different because my daughter went to a parochial school and in the parochial school, if they didn't toe the line, they were asked to leave and then went to the public school. I had three boys that went to public schools and they went before the, well they graduated a good many years ago and I don't think they had as many problems as they have today but I think they had more than we do today. I think there was less discipline but I'm not sure of that.

Dodson: Some of the students who have assisted me in this work have been very much surprised to hear that an earlier generation was unaquainted with narcotics in school, that that is a recent development. Is that your impression? Did you know of anyone when you were in school who was using narcotics?

Canby: No, and we had a class of one hundred and four that graduated from Van Nuys High School in 1931 and to the best of my knowledge, there were two kids in school who smoked and they used to smoke infrequently and that's about the worst problem we had. I do not recall of any kids ever using alcohol--it was during prohibition days too,

as you might recall and narcotics was something that was unheard of.

Dodson: Well thats been my impression and the other people that I've interviewed have been of the same opinion, that was a practically unknown situation in their particular time. Can you tell us anything about the sort of social life that you had as a teenager in the Valley? What did you do to have a good time?

Canby: Well, I can't, this is sort of a question thats difficult for me to answer because most of us that I ran around with spent a lot of time studying; we really didn't have much of a social life. We were limited in our transportation and it was also during depression days and it was unusual for a family to have more than one car and so we did an awful lot of walking, we did a lot of bicycle riding. I belonged to the ROTC which was a fine organization in the Van Nuys High School and we had one or two military balls a year, we had the senior class dances and that was almost the extent of it. We would go to the picture show in Van Nuys and there wasn't a great deal of social life other than that which we created by visiting girlfriends or borfriends. My own life was rather a dull one from a social life because I ran around with two fellows and all we did was go hiking or work in our workshops or work in the high school laboratories in our spare time.

- Dodson: What was the religious situation in the Valley? Were the churches relatively smaller in membership, would you say, than they are now? Did the churches put on activities which could be described as social?
- Canby: I can't answer that very fully because I can't compare them. I do not attend church now. My wife does and so do my children but I do not and I did attend Sunday school when I was a boy in Van Nuys so I'd rather not discuss, I don't know.
- Boyer: Did I ask you about the appearance of the Valley when you were first here? You came as a small child to the Valley, right? And what the appearance was--I mean in population, etcetera, and I suppose there were mountains. Did you ever go hunting? You said you'd go hiking.
- Canby: Oh yeah..yeah. When I arrived in Van Nuys and lived on Irwin Street near Kester Avenue, well Kester at that time was unpaved and the town square was from Oxnard to Vanowen and from Hazeltine from the East side to Kester on the west side was a mile square. Rather interesting too, I might mention, you may have not picked this up, it's sort of interesting, that when the streets were laid out in Van Nuys they started in the southern most street within the confines of this town square and that was Aetna, the next was Bessemer, the next was Calvert, then Delano and Erwin and

and as you see it's adding up to A,B,C,D,E,F, so on, and then there was Gilmore, Hamlin, and I guess they couldn't find an I so then they threw in a Haynes and no J and then Kittredge and then Vanowen and uh..

Dodson: It is interesting. No one else has told us that.

Canby: And uh, Victory Boulevard when I arrived here was called Leesdale and that was terminated approximately, oh I imagine, at Sepulveda and Sepulveda also was a dirt road. Then Leesdale was then changed to Victory Boulevard after the war. And we had the street cars that ran through the Van Nuys Boulevard were known as the Big Red Rattler, and there was a station at the corner of Friar Street and Van Nuys Boulevard then went north to Sherman way and then one branch went off to Reseda and Canoga Park. Reseda at that time was known as Marion and then was changed to Reseda and then another part of the Big Red Rattler went north to San Fernando. But the, as I remember, there was approximately a thousand people in Van Nuys at that time and on the periphery was, oh, sagebrush and then beginning of farmland. We had coyotes that would come in and steal my mother's chickens. That was at the corner of Kester and Erwin Street. The Van Nuys, excuse me, the river bed of the Los Angeles River was truly a little meandering creek that went through the

Valley. There were Willows and Sycamores and Cottonwoods in that area and we used to go down there and fish for little minnows and crawfish and collect butterflies and that was favorite collecting ground all around the river from Van Nuys to ,oh, North Hollywood where we would ride on our bicycles. And East of Van Nuys in the area between say, Woodman and Laurel Canyon where Sears is now located was all a big wash and unpaved and when we had heavy rains the only way to get to Los Angeles was to down Van Nuys Boulevard to Ventura and then across through over Cahuenga Pass. If you had to go to North Hollywood, that was then known as Lankershim : you went to Ventura Boulevard and then over to Lankershim Boulevard and north again. And the houses were sparsely settled, the community was sparsely settled; nothing greater than a two story building on Van Nuys Boulevard and the business district exyended from Friar Street to Erwin Street and most of that was on the west side. California Bank was on Sylvan Street. My father had his office above that until I arrived here in 1946.

Dodson: Do you recall the names of some of those business establishments on Van Nuys Boulevard?

Canby: Yes, I could, I think, I'll try. Starting at the corner of Friar Street and Van Nuys Boulevard

and extending south on the western side was Moore's Department Store and Dry Goods and that was run by Ernest C. Moore and his brother, Will. They have families, relatives, descendents living in the Valley today. And then there was Nordvold's, N-O-R-D-V-O-L-D, Nordvold's Furniture Store, that was a large one and then there was Sam Weaver's men's clothing store and I've omitted a few because I can't recall them all and then at the northwest corner of Sylvan and Van Nuys Boulevard was Mark Sutton's Pharmacy and on the south corner, southwest corner was the California Bank and then immediately south of that and partly underneath the bank was Bolanger Brother's Grocery Store. It was a small store but the only one in town and associated with that was Nehart's[?] Butcher Shop and then below that was a little restaurant as I remember, there probably was a barber shop and there was Andrew's Hardware Store and further on down I can't recall what was there, I think there was a old hotel and then we've now almost reached Irwin Street and I'm lost, I don't know what was on the corner, later it became Cowdrie's[?] Drugstore. Now if we back and started down the east side of Van Nuys Boulevard on and beginning at Friar Street and working south, as I remember when we arrived there was a vacant lot and then there was a..

Dodson: What year would this have been, Dr. Canby?

Canby: Oh, about 1918 when we arrived and then there was a big vacant lot and then there was a small building and I think that's where LaMay and Beavis[?] had their real estate office and LaMay was one of the early men and his, I think it was his nephew was Charles Beavis and he in turn had a nephew by the name of Harry Beavis who was very prominent in the Valley and unfortunately Harry is deceased and you could have gained an awful lot of information from him. And then south of the little real estate office was Leveen's Hardware, that's L-E-V-E-E-N, Leveen's Hardware Store. And then we come down to another big vacant lot which is now owned by the Security, excuse me, that was not a vacant lot. We come to the corner and that is where, when I arrived here I think that there was a bank building and it became the Security Bank. One of the members of the bank was Mr. High[?], I think it was Jess High and his son is an attorney here in Van Nuys. It is now the corner where the Security Pacific Bank is located. Across the Street on Sylvan Street, I don't remember what was on that corner, I almost think there was a billiard parlor but I'm not too sure. then there was R.H. Dunne[?] Realty, Then there was the old Rivoli Theater, and down on the corner of Erwin and Van Nuys Boulevard was the Pacific Battery and that was founded by a man named William Wiest[?] and his

son is here today and he runs a small repair garage, is run by Harold Wiest. I might add that that was a fascinating place for the school kids to go by because they had big mercury vapor lamps in the window to attract people and they would flash on and off and we could and we could stand at the sidewalk and watch them pour lead, making batteries, it was an interesting sight. And then further south we had, I think we had at about what is now I guess it's Calvert Street was the Huffacker Garage that sold Ford's. I may have some of these a little out of order, and then down around the railroad was the big cannery and that was an interesting thing. We had, I think, two canneries in Van Nuys. They were very prominent and employed a lot of people and on the corner of Oxnard and Van Nuys Boulevard was the large building known as the Robert Morgan Organ Factory and that was a going concern because this came into being prominently when the motion pictures developed and they created the organs that were in the movie theaters that always played the music before and during the playing of the picture before the talkies came about. I think I've covered just about all that I can think of at the moment. We have Praisewater's Funeral Parlor on the corner of Calvert and Van Nuys Boulevard.

Dodson: Well, I'm really glad to get that information, Dr. Canby, because that gives us a fairly complete catalogue of the early business establishments and we didn't have this from any other source. Incidentally, you have an excellent memory to be able to give us these names. We're really grateful for this. Can you tell us, Dr. Canby, how you happened to become a physician?

Canby: Well, that's a little hard. I think it's hard for every doctor but undoubtedly I was influenced because my father was a physician and I admired him and his work and I apparently was scientifically oriented in school. I had a lot of fine science teachers in high school who encouraged me to continue in that field and there didn't seem to be any other choice. Needless to say, I am so happy that I did. I've never regretted any minute that I've spent as a doctor. It's been a very rewarding life and I hope there will be a lot of others. I'm disappointed that none of my three boys or my daughter were interested in medicine. They were scientifically but not biologically oriented so they've pursued different patterns.

Dodson: What line of vocational training did they go into, Dr. Canby? What are their professions?

Canby: My daughter, the oldest, is a teacher. She is a graduate of UCLA. My oldest son is a mechanical

engineer, graduate of Davis, and also has his Master's in Business Administration from USC.

My middle aged son is a graduate of the University of Michigan in naval architecture and engineering. And my youngest son has his Master's from Michigan in naval architecture and engineering.

Dodson: Do you have any personal recollection, Dr. Canby, about World War I?

Canby: No, I have none except that I can remember the excitement and everyone discussing that the armistice had arrived and that is all that I recall.

Boyer: Would the same hold true for like the flu epidemic that came through here?

Canby: No.

Boyer: Now can you remember that?

Canby: No. I do remember the flu epidemic more vividly because of my father working so hard and, by his own admission, making so many house calls that were rather fruitless; it was obvious to him that the individual was going to die and nothing, there was no, nothing that could be offered to the individual except hope that, hopes that they would recover and I can remember that he was gone day and night, driving, taking care of these people and then telling my mother that so and so had died. Those are my recollections of the Valley of the flu. I remember a number of my friend's fathers

dying.

Dodson: It didn't affect any member of your family then?

Canby: We were unaffected in spite of my father's exposure to it.

Dodson: This to me is amazing that as many exposures that he had, he didn't himself contract it.

Canby: Well, I think in light of what is known today, perhaps he'd been exposed to many minor flu epidemics and had built up a sizable immunity which protected him.

Dodson: Now as far as World War II is concerned, I imagine you have some rather vivid recollections of that. Do you recall how you were affected by Pearl Harbor? What you were doing at the time?

Canby: Oh yes. Everyone, that stands out in everyone's memory. My wife and I and my daughter were driving along the Angeles Crest Highway on that Sunday when we heard the news and were dismayed and shocked as everyone was and then throughout, I was in my training as a surgical resident at the County Hospital and in the, I guess it was in December of '40, no it was in February of '43, I entered the military service with a very good friend of mine. We went to Carlisle Barracks and thence I went to Africa and was in on the invasion of Italy...[?] that continued for a long while. And I well remember when the, I was back in the United States when the war terminated in

Europe and I well remember the termination in the Europe, in Japan.

Dodson: Did you serve in the Pacific at all then? You said you remember the termination in Japan.

Canby: No, I was strictly in Africa and Italy and then in the United States at Torney[?] General Hospital, Palm Springs for approximately one year at the close of my time in the service.

Dodson: I see. Do you recall the effects of any of the earthquakes here in the Valley? You probably remember the Long Beach earthquake, the Tehachapi quake, and that sort of thing. Did they do any damage here to your knowledge?

Canby: Like wars, I think one remembers earthquakes and I remember the Long Beach earthquake well. I was sitting in my back yard with my mother and father when the wires and the trees started to shake and we could hear the rumble of our own frame home. We had no damage at our place and at Van Nuys. The Tehachapi earthquake was unusual in that we had gone north on a camping trip and everything was standing well as we went through Bakersfield and then on our return from the mountains where we had been camping and heard nothing about the earthquake, we saw all the damaged buildings. We did not have any damage in Van Nuys as I recall. And I also well remember the earthquake at, I guess

that was 1971 was it?

Dodson: The Sylmar quake.

Canby: The Sylmar quake of '71. That, we all remember that.

Dodson: Did you suffer any damage yourself as a result of that quake? Your property?

Canby: No, we had no damage whatsoever.

Dodson: Were you living in the house where we are now, on Havenhurst, at that time?

Canby: Yes, and I think that's accountable by the fact that we're on a large alluvial fan and it's not any solid bedrock and it shakes like a bowl of jelly and without any damage to the concrete structure.

Dodson: Were you at that time in active practice and connected with the Valley Presbyterian Hospital or had you retired by then?

Canby: No, I was in active practice and I presume you're leading up to: What did we do? Is that correct Dr. Dodson?

Dodson: Yes, and I also wanted to know if the hospital itself suffered any damage.

Canby: First of all, the hospital sustained some minor damage to the plaster. I think the elevators were momentarily out of commission. I believe there was a problem with the power lines but it was a functioning unit and it was remarkable how all of the doctors and the nurses and the hospital staff personnel came to the hospital. We had been fairly well

to report to a hospital of our choice, a predetermined hospital of our choice, and on on of our second choice in the event we couldn't get to the one of our first choice, in the event of a major disaster. So we were sort of overwhelmed with personnel and talent and fortunately we had very few seriously injured people who came to the Valley Presbyterian Hospital.

Dodson: Was there a panic among your patients as a result of it, the patients in the hospital at the time?

Canby: I can't truthfully answer it. I think if I, I'm guessing, I don't think there was very much panic. I think everyone behaved very well and the nursing personnel was very well trained and it was daylight. That allays a lot of fears too.

Dodson: From what you say then I assume that we do have some general disaster plans for the Valley in the event of a major disaster. Is that correct?

Canby: Well, at that time we did and somehow we don't adhere to these too often and we're not maintaining the surveillance as we should. I think this is a failure from higher ups and I think we should have some sort of a drill, but we don't have a proper one.

Dodson: Well I've been interested in that because I hadn't heard anything about it and I wondered if we had any plans--things that everyone knew he should do, or at least in certain professions, in the event

of a major disaster. As you know, we are warned that we do have a major quake coming but you feel that we hav'nt made any preparations to meet that, at least as far as the medical profession is concerned?

Canby: Well, maybe after a second look at the whole situation, I think every doctor, first of all, realizes that they can't do very much at home and if they can get to a hospital, their point of operation, they will go to the hospital. The nurses, of course, will do the same. It's my understanding that the ambulance drivers and operators are always well trained as is the police department and fire department. So maybe what I originally said doesn't bear out what really exists. We have quite a number of ham radio operators that are very well organized and I remember when they did have the earthquake, why, they had their CB units set up at the hospital and that was in operation and was going very well - and I imagine the same exists. So maybe I misquoted what actually exists.

Dodson: Well, I'd wondered about that. Can you think of any other historic event in the Valley that affected you or that you were very much interested in that you would like to mention to us?

Canby: Well, one thing that comes to my mind that a lot of people recall was when the San Francisquito Dam broke and it stood out in the minds of a lot of us

particularly the high school students because we had a chemistry teacher by the name of Jahile[?] Davis who was greatly admired in those days and still is today and Jahile ran our science club. I seem to be digressing to the point of your question but I think its sort of interesting..

Dodson: Go right ahead. This is just what we want.

Canby: ..and each year, our science club of approximately 30 to 40 or 50 students always went through the power plant at the St. Francis Dam.and it was a saturday excursion. I might also side track that when we took trips in those days we didn't take time off from school, we did it on weekends, and we had a lot of fine teachers that would give their time as well so we had been to the St. Francisquito Dam just a short time before on our outing and then, when it broke,it also came home rather strongly to a lot of people in the San Fernando Valley because many of the families who had lived here had moved up there as employees of the Department of Water and Power and they lived at the base of the dam, of couse they lost their lives. My father gave his time and went up to Bardsdale[?] which was a funny little old town. It was founded in the oil days and up in the top of the hill and it became the headquarters where they brought in all of the bodies and I went up to visit him one day and with Mr. Sutton

and his son and it was rather startling and bewildering to a young individual to see these bodies brought in draped with sheets and then the relatives to come in to identify them It was a never to be forgotten moment in my life and then to return, oh within two or three weeks to the base of the St. Francisquito Dam and see this giant monolith remaining right in the center and both sides had washed away. So I think that was one of the events in the history of the Valley that I well remember.

Dodson: I think it's true, isn't it, that water didn't come down into the Valley. Didn't it turn westward or something of the kind, it didn't plug the Valley itself.

Canby: No, this had no bearing whatsoever on the San Fernando Valley. This was up in the Santa Clara Valley and it was near, the floodwaters came down through Santa Paula and then on into the, through I think Moorpark and Pyruce[?] and Santa Paula and that area. Bardsdale was on the western side of the mountains. It washed out great acreages of oranges but it was so close to home and we did have dams nearby namely our dam at the north end of the Valley here at that time and so everyone was nervous about that.

Boyer: Also we have had floods in the Valley. Do you remember there was a large one in 1935 I believe?

Canby: Flooding doesn't stand out as a particular important point because every winter we were flooded here in the Valley and sometimes we didn't go to school. I lived on Kester Street. It was almost a mile for me to get to grammar school and Van Nuys Boulevard would be flooded from curb to curb and the merchants would sandbag their stores and Tyrone was west, was the street west..correction, Tyrone is two blocks east of Van Nuys Boulevard and that was notorious for being flooded and until a huge flood control channel was put down the middle of under Van Nuys Boulevard, why, we always had floods. Also people would lose their life and people would lose their lives crossing on Victory Boulevard, trying to go from Van Nuys to North Hollywood. They'd be washed into the wash and drowned. I have amongst my pictures of some of my pictures that depict that, those deaths.

Dodson: Parts of the Valley then were practically impossible as a result of the floods.

Canby: Oh yes, the wash area west of, east of Van Nuys, east of Hazeltine and east of Woodman was all flat lands clear over to where Sears on Laurel Canyon as that was one of the big washes, I think that was the Pacoima Wash and that was eventually controlled when the Pacoima Dam was built north of San Fernando.

Dodson: Do you recall when that dam was built?

Canby: No, I'm guessing it's around 1927 or 28 or 29 thereabouts.

Dodson: Then these floods which were so destructive ended about when as a result of the flood control projects?

Canby: Oh, I don't remember when they ended. I think they are just now starting to end and even when we moved into this house here we had cars washed down along side of us. That was up until this large flood control channel was put in. That was, makes it around 1962 or 63, we had flooding right here. But I think the major flooding: we had a big flood in Van Nuys in about 1949 or 1950 that flooded all of Van Nuys Boulevard. It flooded all the side streets, washed in mud and water into my office on Hamlin street.

Dodson: Now we've mentioned to you in the little outline that we sent you some of the types of changes that have appeared in the Valley since you've been living here. Do any of those seem more important to you than others? We listed such things as the appearance of the Valley, fashions, fads, morality, politics and technology and probably some that you can think of that we have'nt got down here.

Canby: Well, that's a big order Dr. Dodson. We, as I've indicated earlier, transformed ourselves from a, oh a rather desert wasteland, into a stage of which it was a lush agriculture and surrounding Van Nuys and extending west were huge acreages of lima beans, alfalfa, onions, potatoes and further south where the soil was somewhat alkali were vast acreages of sugar

beets. This continued clear across the Valley westward to probably Canoga Park. And East of us toward North Hollywood were large acreages of fruit trees. Those were pears, excuse me, apricots and peaches. Then in the foothills to the north were the vast orange groves and the large olive orchards at Sylmar. Now that was following the desert stage and with the advent of water which came into the Valley, as I recall, I don't recollect, but from history, I think it came in approximately October of 1913 but it took about that long before all of this vast agricultural land developed. Along about that time when it was sort of fully developed, and people were moving in here slowly and the town and towns were growing slowly, why I went away to school and then the war came along and the Valley was a suitable site for defense plants and they sprung up all over, notably Lockheed and oh the smaller ones. My uncle who was a machinist was very active, alot of development along the railroad tracks. I don't recall what all was developed and then there were military installations and following that so many of the servicemen returned to live in the Valley and I believe that was the big impetus for the development. Along with that, why our climate enhanced this and the manufacturers saw the labor pool and manufacturing came as a lessor,uh small

shop type. And it has now become the favorite bedroom of Los Angeles and many people commute to Los Angeles, commute to Santa Monica, Long Beach, which these are facts which you well know. In so far as fashions go, I don't think there has been anything characteristic of the Valley that's different from elsewhere.

I think we live a very casual life in the San Fernando Valley. Climatically it lends itself well.

Fads, I can't speak on that and morality, I don't think there's anything unusual about our morals.

I think they're just as bad here as they are elsewhere,

And as far as politics go, I think that politically

the Valley used to be more..I think I was on the subject of politics and I think that the Valley was

more oriented toward the Republican Party and today

I would say it's swinging well onto the Democratic

side, Democratic Party. I think you have to remember

that the Valley, at it's inception was made up of

a lot of pioneers and I doubt if they were very

much interested in national politics at all and we

were sort of a little isolated section of the Los

Angeles County and then I believe we were quickly

annexed to, became, I think we were initially an

unincorporated town and then we became part of the

Los Angeles City. As long as I've been out here, I've

always thought that we were associated with the Los

Angeles City.

Dodson: May I ask...politics Dr. Canby? How do you feel about this movement toward secession from Los Angeles? Do you think the Valley should or should not do that?

Canby: Oh, I look at it with a lot of mixed feelings about it. I really, I don't think we would gain an awful lot by it. I think we have more to lose than we have to gain. I know we just went through this business with Canyon Country. It's immaterial how I voted on it. I'm very sympathetic with the people out there who felt they were isolated from the city and could probably do a better job than the city could. On the other hand, there are other things that a large governing body offers that a smaller one can't offer. You see it around you when some of the small cities don't do as well as the large city maybe an exception to it is Beverly Hills and Beverly Hills has a tremendous amount of wealth which offsets any advantage that the city might offer. If you have plenty of money then you can secede and it's easy. Actually, I think it would be a mistake.

Dodson: Well, one of the problems that is worrying many people in the Valley who have school age children is this question of busing. How do you feel about that? Or if you don't care to comment on that at all, well feel perfectly free to refrain.

Canby: Wee, you see, I didn't have to go through this with my own children because they were all bussed

to one school or else I took them or else they rode their bikes. They got to school. We didn't have the problems. I have a great deal of background knowledge of the need for bussing. You may not think so because I'm seeminly a WASP isolated in here in the San Fernando Valley but I served for three years on the admissions commitee at USC and I'm very knowledgeable about the problems of the Blacks and the Chicanos. I feel that there's a great need that they should be well educated. I'm not sure, because I have'nt delved into it deeply enough, whether it is a good or a bad thing. I think from the economical side it's very costly to have to bus children and it uses a tremendous amount of money that could be better spent for teachers and the machinery of education rather than getting them to the point. Now I may be wrong about this. So you probably say well I'm opposed to it but I'm not really opposed to it but I think it's economically unsound. I don't know what the real answer is. I think that to bus the teachers probably is a better thing but apparently the teachers do not want to be moved from their location. So I don't think I've answered your question, Dr. Dodson.

Dodson: From the medical point of view, is there any objection to busing small children a great distance from their home?

Canby: I'm not a pediatrician but I don't think it's

advisable. If you take two hours out of their educational life, whether it be in the classroom or playing, I think it's wrong to put them in a butts.

Dodson: Since we're talking about that, do you have any recollection of any minority problems in the Valley since you lived here?

Canby: When I grew up in the San Fernando Valley, I knew no prejudices. I learned my prejudices at UCLA and the reason I had no prejudice when I was a boy because we had the Mexican population now known as Chicano. I prefer "Mexican" because that's what they all called themselves in those days and I think we had one Jewish boy in my grammar school class and perhaps two in our high school. We did not have any Blacks at all and when I went to UCLA, then I was told that you can't trust this or that nationality or that race which was wrong because I had always trusted them and then later, of course, I had a complete reversal. So actually we had no prejudices at all in the San Fernando Valley. In our playground, why, the Mexicans and the Whites mixed just as well as the Whites or the Blacks, or the Whites. They were active participants in our football teams, our baseball teams, our track teams. We had stars represented by the Mexicans. So the Mexican girls, the unfortunate thing in those days and as a young student during the depression I didn't

realize why the Mexicans didn't graduate. I don't think we had a Mexican graduate from Van Nuys High School until perhaps the year ahead of me or the year behind me because they dropped out to go to work and they worked in the fields and this was part of their family's lifestyle. They weren't interested and they were kept from it probably. In fact I'm sure they were kept from going to school.

Dodson: Was there any bad feeling about the Japanese occupants of the Valley during the war or just at the outbreak of the war?

Canby: I don't have enough knowledge about that to answer it. I don't think we had too many Japanese in the Valley. I'm not sure of it. I can't answer that.

Dodson: Could you tell us anything about other historic sites or buildings?

Canby: I don't think I can tell you anything, important sites. I well remember when City Hall was built. I don't remember when it was. It would seem an unusual thing to put that great big tall building right in the middle of Van Nuys. When it was first built, I imagine, it was occupied for the first two floors and that was all.

Dodson: Do you have any personal knowledge or were you personally acquainted with some of the early builders of Van Nuys like the Whitsetts or the Witleys or any of those people or did they come before your time really?

Canby: Whitley I remember well and I remember the Whitley home. I remember Mr. W.P. Whitsett and his home on Van Nuys Boulevard and then later when he built his large shopping center which extended from Kittredge north to Vanowen. I remember his two sons and his daughter. One of the old time builders was a man by the name of John Caldwell who was an unusual character about town and a fine builder. Probably the builder that I remember the most was a man by the name of George Chapman. I'm not sure whether that was the father's name or not but then there was George Chapman who is still living today. He is seventy-one years of age and one of my close friends. He did an awful lot of building in the San Fernando Valley. He, I don't remember how many years but something in the range of fifteen to twenty years was building buildings on the UCLA campus. His job has been taken over by his son Gerald[?].

Dodson: Do you know any members of the Van Nuys or Lankershim Family?

Canby: No, several years ago I had the opportunity of meeting Mr. I.N.[?] Van Nuys Jr. and I think he is now dead.

Dodson: Are any descendents of those families still living in the Valley to your knowledge?

Canby: I'm pretty sure theres no member of the Lankershim

family but I don't know bout the Van Nuysa family. There are members of the Van Nuys family living. Where they are, I do not know and I think there are still the two Whitsett boys living.

Dodson: Can you think, Dr. Canby, of any significant events or anecdotes about the Valley that we have'nt asked about at all? You probably can.

Canby: Well I could ramble around a great deal about these things. Some of the little things that I think are interesting, if you want to compare the past..

Dodson: Some of those little things are very important to us as giving a picture of life in the Valley as it was.

Canby: Well, we had four high schools when I went to high school. That was Canoga Park, San Fernando, Van Nuys and Burbank. Burbank, I don't think, was truly listed in the Valley but they comprised our San Fernando Valley league in all sports and so there was always a great big entourage every time we played each other for football and there was a tremendous amount of rivalry between these four schools. That was something that stands out in my memory. I can tell one cute story about one of my teachers that is still living. It was when I was in grammar school. We acquired what I guess was called agriculture or maybe it was called garden teacher in those days. We used to putter around and plant a row of carrots or beets and his name was John J.

Lynch, L-Y-N-C-H, and another friend of mine by the name of Brooks Williams who is now in the Department of Education of LA City Schools and Dick Dunne about whom I have spoken, the three of us took Mr. Lynch out into the wash that was east of Hazeltine to go snipe hunting and John Lynch had just arrived from some southern university and was very naive as the evening proved to be and we drove out in his Model T and sent him off with a gunny sack yelling "here snipy,snipy,snipy" and we took the keys out of his ignition and dropped them on the car and then ran home. Mr. Lynch was so embarrassed to have been taken that he said nothing about it to any of us and we were so afraid that we didn't mention it either and then we got through grammar school and went into junior high and I think we were in the eighth grade then and lo and behold if our agriculture teacher , it was announced that we were going to have a new one, and he walked in one day and it was Mr. Lynch and he read the roster of those in the class and he came to Charles Canby and Dick Dunne and Brooks Williams and he went over those names and he kept muttering them aloud. We didn't know what we had in store for us and again nothing was said. He treated us very cordially and we did not pull any more pranks on him and years went by and this was never divulged until my own son went

to Van Nuys High School and when he was taking Biology under Mr. Lynch, Mr. Lynch, in the presence of all these students, told what my son John's father had done to him some many years before and I always thought that was a very benevolent way that he put it, phrased it and..

Dodson: I'm a little curious at this point to know whether Paula knows what snipe hunting is.

Boyer: Yeah, I do.[...] a trick that you told me.

Canby: Well actually there is a bird called a snipe and it is shot at and I don't know whether they eat them or not but it is a bird but the method that we used for catching snipe was to take a gunny sack and hold it out and you held it in the air on a dark night and then others of us beat the bush and you stood there yelling, "here snipy" and the snipe was supposed to fly into this gunny sack.

Boyer: I'm just surprised that the story is out here because I had heard that back in the midwest.

Canby: No, it's a common story but this young man was so naive that he had never heard of this and we didn't think we could ever pull it on him and also while I'm talking about grammar school in those days, we had a stable in the back of the school because many of the students rode in on their ponies and their carts and when I started in school in 1918 there was, oh I imagine, about a dozen ponies

or carts out and tied up in the stables for these kids that came in from a distance.

Dodson: Well, can you think of anything else that you'd like to tell us? That's rather interesting to know that snipe hunting was done here in the Valley. I'm from Colorado. We sometimes took people snipe hunting there too.

Canby: Well, I think the Colorado and the California snipe are pretty much the same. They're rather ethereal. No, I can't think of anything. You can talk forever about things of the past.

You have been listening to an interview with Dr. Charles B. Canby conducted at Dr. Canby's home: 4367 Hayvenhurst Avenue, Encino, California. The interview was conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson, Curator of the Los Angeles Valley College Historical Museum and by Miss Paula Boyer, Field Deputy to Dr. Dodson. The date is February 16, 1977.*

*Transcribed from tape February 6, 1987 by TAQ